

What's My Line?

Knowing your responsibilities
regarding telephone lines and
equipment can save you money

**When it comes to your phone service, we know you have many questions.
The State of Wisconsin's TeleWatch program will give you plain talk
about your telephone service.**

The following are answers to frequently asked questions about telephone wires and equipment.

Do I have to be responsible for maintenance of the telephone wires and equipment in my home?

Yes. In the mid 1980s, all telephone companies were ordered to transfer ownership and maintenance of inside wire and customer premises equipment (phones) to customers. This was done to allow non-telephone company sources to connect wire and equipment to the telephone network.

Am I responsible for the wires outside my home?

No. The telephone utility still owns and maintains the main lines of the network including the drop wire from the pole or buried service line to the customer's residence or business premises.

What should I do if I have problems with my phone line?

A little testing before calling the phone company may save you money. If the problem is with your phone or inside wire, the phone company will charge you for a service call even if they do not fix the problem. If a problem exists, such as no dial-tone or noisy line, unplug & take your phone & cord from the wall-jack, to the network interface device or NID (located inside or outside the building, where the outside line is connected) and open (unscrew) the customer-side of the NID. Once inside the NID, unplug the "pig-tailed wall-jack plug" and replace it with your phone & corded-jack (doing this disconnects your inside-wire at the NID from the rest of the telephone company's network).

Then with your hand set listen for dial tone. If you receive dial tone, dial a number as a test to check for noise on the line or any other problems you have identified. If the problem you have identified disappears with your phone connected at the NID, the problem is most likely with your inside wire.

If the problem remains on the line, test the line again by plugging a different phone into the NID. If the problem still occurs with a different phone, the problem is most likely with the telephone company network. If the problem is resolved by testing a different phone, try replacing the phone or phone cord.

Once these tests are completed and you still do not hear a dial tone at the NID, use a neighbor's phone, a pay phone or cellular phone and dial 611 or call the repair number listed in your phone book for help.

What if I have a problem with my cordless phone?

The same procedure above can be used for cordless phones. The difference is that the cord to the base is plugged into the NID to use the hand-set. Also, check to make sure the phone is charged.

What if I don't have a NID?

If a NID is not in place, call your telephone company. There will be no charge to the customer for this portion of the work. You will, however, be charged if additional work is performed by the telephone company. The utility is required to make a premises visit, test the facilities and install a NID if requested to do so.

Do I have a choice of who repairs my phone or inside wire?

Yes. If the customer-owned wire or equipment showed trouble, the customer has the choice to pay either the telephone company or other qualified repair personnel, or to do the work themselves.

How much would the telephone company charge me to correct the problem?

There should be no charge if the telephone company repairs its own network. If the problem is with the phone or inside wire and the customer authorizes the telephone company to correct the problem, the telephone company will charge for this work. Other qualified repair technicians may be listed in the telephone book.

Always check the repair service guidelines in your telephone company directory. Any work requested by the customer, such as moving a drop or cable facility, which would not otherwise be required, can be billed to the customer requesting the work.

Should I sign up for an inside wire maintenance plan?

Many local phone companies offer plans where you pay a fixed monthly fee, and they will fix your inside wire if and when you have a problem with it. Since problems with inside wire are relatively rare, however, you should determine whether this service is worth the cost. If a problem does occur, anybody may do the repair; you do not need to have the phone company do it.

Am I responsible for the wire and equipment maintenance if I live in an apartment?

Normally, the owner of a building is responsible for having telephone service available to the apartment units and to keep wiring to the units in working order. Residential tenants are generally responsible for charges for installation of their service. Check your lease if you are unsure. If you are having problems with your phone, contact your apartment manager to find out your NID location.

Do residents of nursing homes pay for the wire and equipment maintenance?

In nursing care facilities, telephone service to individual rooms may not be a part of the services provided. Customers may have to pay the normal service connection charges plus wiring charges and be responsible for maintenance. Often this is clearly stated in the contract.

What is the business customer's responsibility for wire and equipment maintenance?

Business customers usually have a lease that specifies that the tenant has total responsibility for inside telephone facilities. In older buildings, where the existing inside wire may still be the property of the telephone company, the business customer must contact the telephone company if any rearrangement or removal of the wiring is required.

What if I need an off-premises extension? Is that part of my responsibility too?

Extensions to outdoor or out building locations, which are wired from the customer side of the main service drop protector or NID are the responsibility of the customer.

Extensions which are wired directly from the telephone pole or pedestal are maintained by the telephone company. There may be a charge for installing and maintaining this service.

How can I avoid cutting phone, electric, or gas lines when digging?

Call Diggers Hotline at least 3 days before you dig. The appropriate utilities will then mark the location of buried phone, electric, or gas lines. Make sure the area has been marked before proceeding with work.

Diggers Hotline: 800/242-8511
Milwaukee Area: 414/259-1181
FAX: 414/259-0947
TDD: 800/542-2289
www.diggershotline.com

What happens if I don't call Diggers Hotline?

You may be seriously injured and/or liable for damages if you come into contact with underground utility facilities.

Are the cable locates and markings accurate?

Facilities may vary from the markings anywhere from 12 to 18 inches and may be as shallow as 4 inches or as deep as 48 inches. So exercise caution by hand digging if necessary. When calling Digger's Hotline, it is a good idea to request that the entire property be marked for underground utility facilities so little is left to chance when actual digging begins.

Who can help?

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin is the state agency that oversees the telephone industry. Most local and in-state telephone billing and service complaints may be directed to the PSC. Call or write to:

P.O. Box 7854
Madison, WI 53707-7854
(800) 225-7729 (800-CAL-PSCW)
TTY (608) 267-1479
Fax (608) 266-3957
E-Mail: pscsecs@psc.state.wi.us
<http://psc.wi.gov>

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection mediates and investigates telecommunications complaints, including those regarding mail and phone solicitations, deceptive and misleading marketing, and long distance rate changes. Call or write to:

P.O. Box 8911
Madison, WI 53708-8911
(800) 422-7128
TTY (608) 224-5058
Fax (608) 224-4939
E-Mail: datcpholine@datcp.state.wi.us
<http://datcp.state.wi.us>

The Wisconsin Department of Justice enforces state law, including telecommunications. Write to them at:

123 West Washington Ave.
P.O. Box 7857
Madison, WI 53707-7857
www.doj.state.wi.us

The Federal Communications Commission is the federal agency that oversees the telecommunications industry. Call or write to:

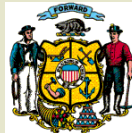
Consumer Protection Branch
Common Carrier Bureau
445 12th St., SW
Washington, DC 20554
Toll-free (888) 225-5322 (888-CALL FCC)
Toll-free TTY
(888) 835-5322 (888-TELL FCC)
www.fcc.gov

Bilingual service / Servicio Bilingüe

The Public Service Commission (PSC) is also able to provide customer assistance in Spanish. When calling the PSC, please ask to speak to a Spanish speaking representative.

En la Comisión de Servicios Públicos del estado de Wisconsin (PSC) podemos asistirles en español. Cuando llame a la PSC, pida hablar con un representante de habla hispana.

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the provision of programs, services, or employment. If you are speech hearing, or visually impaired and need assistance, call (608) 262-8524 or TTY (608) 267-1479. We will try to find another way to get the information to you in usable form.



This brochure was produced jointly by the WI Public Service Commission, the WI Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, and the WI Department of Justice.